



*Investing in Our Children's Future*

## 2016 Public Policy Agenda

### OUR VISION:

**Affordable, quality early care and education options that promote children's success in school and life, enable parents to work and advance in their careers, and provide a ready workforce for business growth.**

### ECONOMIC IMPACT and BENEFITS

Child care financial supports keep low-wage service sector jobs competitive in the U.S, helping parents enter the labor market, improving their attendance, productivity, retention and skill development. Quality early care and education is linked to school readiness, high school graduation and preparation for the highly skilled workforce essential to Westchester's economic prosperity:

- Shift the perception of child care subsidies from "entitlements" to smart investments in our region's economic growth and stability
- Increase support for quality child care by business and the Regional Economic Development Council
- Encourage planning and coordination among early care and education programs and school districts

### AFFORDABILITY

One of the most expensive places for child care in the U.S., Westchester child care for a 4 year old averages over \$13,000 annually. A single parent with a preschooler needs an hourly wage of \$28 to pay for housing, child care and other basic needs without help. To put safe, regulated child care within the reach of low and moderate-wage earning parents:

- Return the parent contribution to the previous level of 15%
- Maintain subsidies for families over 200% of the federal poverty level
- Help eligible parents obtain child care subsidies by maintaining the subsidy specialist position at the Council to do outreach, education and application assistance
- Increase federal and state child care subsidy funding to offset the cost of improvements in health and safety regulations and eligibility and avoid cutting children from the program
- Increase state funding for full-day PreK slots in Westchester County

### QUALITY

Although only quality early learning programs produce long-term benefits for children, especially those who are economically-disadvantaged, many parents are unaware of all their child care options or the indicators of quality. As a result, many NYS children are in legally exempt care, which lacks program standards and often resembles babysitting. A child care quality rating system would greatly assist parents in choosing child care but NY has yet to fully implement its rating system, QUALITYstarsNY. NY is one of two states without such a quality rating system:

- Ensure that parents understand all their child care options and the long-term benefits of safe, regulated, quality child care
- Raise subsidy reimbursement rates to current OCFS Market Rate levels to support quality in child care programs
- Invest \$20mil in QUALITYstarsNY to increase the quality of NYS early learning programs